

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 17, 2020**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse (6:14 p.m.), and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Deborah Zuaro (Chair, Conservation Commission), Nigel Tibbles, and Bob Keeley.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Support Services.** Manager Schulz went through the line items in this department's "Contract Services" budgets. In the "Legal Services" budget, Manager Schulz would like to increase the amount appropriated for FY 2021/2022 from \$15,000 to \$20,000. He noted in recent years the budgeted amount often has been exceeded. However, a number of the higher legal bills were related to tax sales due to delinquent property taxes and these expenses were reimbursed at a later time by the property owner. There have been a number of legal issues in recent months so he does expect this line item to go over-budget in the current fiscal year. Although it is difficult to predict the future in regards to litigation, he is asking for the increase to \$20,000. Manager Schulz did note that most of the matters now under litigation should be resolved before the start of the next fiscal year (07/01/21). Manager Schulz is asking for an increase in the "Green Up Day" budget from \$900 to \$1,000. The annual expense is due to dumpster rental, tire disposal fees, etc. The State of Vermont does provide municipalities with \$500 to partially offset these costs.

The budget for printing the Annual Town Report will stay at \$2,500. The municipality has been able to lower these costs in recent years by eliminating home delivery and reducing the number of reports printed. The cost of the annual "Professional Audit" is split between the municipality and the utility departments. Manager Schulz is asking for a slight increase in this line item from \$12,500 to \$13,000. The "County Tax" will see a slight increase from \$27,080 to \$27,900. This is Northfield's annual contribution to fund Washington County services including the sheriff's office, etc. The municipality provides a \$2,500 annual payment to the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC). CVEDC has provided recent assistance to the municipality on such matters as tax stabilization, brownfields redevelopment, and local economic development in general.

The Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) is asking for an increase in Northfield's annual membership dues from \$8,820 to \$9,170. VLCT performs a number of services for its member communities including lobbying the state legislature on their behalf; providing property, liability, and workers' compensation insurance coverage; holding training sessions for municipal staff and officials; offering free legal services; etc. Manager Schulz said the annual membership change for belonging to Mountain Alliance, our solid waste management district, will increase from \$7,000 to \$10,500 in FY 2021/2022. Much of this increase is attributable to new state requirements for proper disposal of recyclables, food waste, etc. Even with this increase, Manager Schulz said we are saving a lot of money belonging to Mountain Alliance as Northfield's previous solid waste management district charged a much higher amount (\pm \$17,000). There is a chance this amount will decrease as Mountain Alliance membership has expanded to include Roxbury. Operating expenses now will be shared by five (5) communities rather than the four (4) original members (Braintree, Brookfield, Northfield, and Randolph). The \$3,350 in the "Support Services" budget for Green Mountain Transit (GMT) covers the expense of operating the shuttle bus that provides specific Elderly/Disabled/ Medicaid services. Many Northfield residents have become reliant on this shuttle bus in order to access medical services, food and clothing stores, etc. The \$21,000 local contribution to fund the GMT weekday commuter bus service between Northfield and Montpelier remains a separate article on the Town Meeting Warning.

- b. Conservation Commission.** Manager Schulz said this budget is level-funded at \$1,050. This breaks down to \$400 for "Tree Inoculation/Planting," \$50 for "Postage," \$50 for "Dues, Meetings, Subscriptions," \$50 for "Advertising/Legal Notices," \$100 for "Departmental Supplies," and \$400 for "Facility Supplies/Maintenance." Deborah Zuaro is the Chair for the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC). She said the major expenses for the NCC include trail management in the Town Forest and preparing for the spread of emerald ash borer infestation in Northfield by inoculating healthy ash trees as well as planting new trees.

NCC did receive a \$30,000 state grant that allowed for the removal of endangered roadside ash trees. Manager Schulz noted the Northfield Electric Department (NED) assisted in this effort by removing a number of roadside ash trees that had encroached on power lines. He added NCC members have done a good job of informing residents of the ash borer menace and how to take steps to delay its spread to Northfield. Manager Schulz asked Ms. Zuaro if the NCC needed any additional budget funds. Ms. Zuaro thought trail management might require more money for signage, etc. NCC did receive a \$500 grant that was used for new trail signs but these funds have been depleted.

- c. **Recreation Committee.** Manager Schulz said the Recreation Committee O&M (Operations and Management) budget is level-funded at \$650 in the next fiscal year. This breaks down to \$100 for postage, \$50 for advertising, and \$500 for department supplies. Turning to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for Grounds/Parks/Facilities, Manager Schulz said the Recreation Committee has identified a need to replace two (2) baseball dugouts at the Northfield Falls Park. The cost would be about \$7,000. This account was largely deleted due to the recent replacement of dugout roofs at Memorial Park so the proposed budget asks for \$2,500 to be added to this account in each of the next two (2) years. Board member Goodrich asked if the local school will be contributing to this project. Manager Schulz said the school did pay for two (2) of the four (4) new dugouts at Memorial Park. However, the Falls Park ballfields are mostly used by Little League baseball, not the schools. Board member Goodrich noted that at the last Recreation Committee meeting (12/01/20), one member claimed that the municipality wasn't providing sufficient financial support for the Recreation Department. She asked if the Recreation Committee members have accepted the current proposed budget. Manager Schulz said committee members Lynn Doney and Frank Hall have been asking for additional funds for resealing the basketball courts at Memorial Park. The account for this is in the Recreation CIP budget and currently has a \$2,411 deficit due to recent work done there. The proposed budget would add \$2,420 to this account in FY 2021/2022 to cancel this overage. The Recreation CIP budget also has \$800 for "Holiday Enhancements," which is less than the amount originally requested by the committee members.
- d. **Energy Committee.** This budget is level-funded at \$250 in the next fiscal year, which breaks down to \$20 for postage, \$100 for dues/meetings/subscriptions, \$30 for advertising, and \$100 for office supplies. This is a relatively new committee and the members don't see much need for additional funds. Their various projects include promoting public transportation, local energy use reduction, etc. Chair Maxwell said the committee members did contact local businesses, etc. to raise funds for their ongoing project to place an informational kiosk on westside of the Common.

Manager Schulz noted the next scheduled budget meeting will be on Saturday, December 19, 2020 beginning at 9:00 a.m. This meeting is expected to last about three (3) hours and will cover proposed budgets for the Northfield Fire Department, Ambulance Service, Cemetery Department, Highway Department, Grounds/Parks/Facilities, and Brown Public Library. Board member Goodrich noted the budget meeting scheduled for Tuesday, December 29, 2020 originally was supposed to cover the topics of municipal revenues and debt. Since these already have been discussed, she asked if this meeting should be cancelled. After some discussion, the Select Board consensus was to retain the meeting for now. The meeting could be used to begin the budget recap and review process.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

- V. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 6:41 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to come out of executive session.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

The Board came out of executive session at 7:30 p.m. No action was taken.

- VI. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

The Board adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 12, 2021.